

BadBoy 49

Chapter 49

Tap, tap, punch

My phone rings. I push it away and press a pillow to my face, screaming my frustrations into it. It is time for training. Ben has a match on Saturday and I promised to help him train. I fought his opponent once. He beat the shit out of me but I lasted all rounds. If he wasn't so muscled, I might have won.

The urge to pick the call and turn him down is strong but I left him at school with a silly excuse I can't remember now. He had to hitch a ride with another jock. Was he able to pick Asher on time?

None of my business. I don't want to see him again. I don't want to be his partner. I don't want to be anything to him. We are wrong for each other.

My phone buzzes again. I fling the pillow and a crashing sound echoes. I don't bother to inspect the damage I might have caused as I push the cover off me. I will save both of us the hurt and break this before things get too far.

I pick the phone and hesitate at Ben's text. He wants to know if I'll come. Sucking it up, I type a quick reply and change into a better outfit. I told him I like him to his face, I should be bold enough to break up with him to his face. Grabbing my keys from my dresser, I make the short drive to the old gym on his street. I practice in the basement of our house except Coach demands my presence. My parents are barely at home to notice.

The car slows to a stop behind Ben's bike. I take a minute to gather my wits. The floor is wet with light rain and the chilly air stings my exposed skin, I jump over a broken fence and find my way inside. I can always pass the front, more accessible entrance but this is shorter. Besides, this is not a gym I'll recommend to anyone but Ben prefers it. Who am I to object?

It is not dark but I turn on my phone's flashlight to light up my path. Water leaks from the missing gaps in the roof, the place is under renovation but Ben insists it's safe. The men who work out here too also seem to share his confidence.

The glass doors come into view, I peek inside. Two men are in the ring. The smaller one is showing the bigger one some techniques, mostly blocking. Ben needs to learn that too until his speed improves. I

spot him by a red punching bag with bandaged hands, head bent over his phone, possibly to ring me again.

On cue, my phone vibrates in my shorts. I end the call and he punches the bag in frustration. I smother a laugh and push the door open. The men lifting weights at a corner stop briefly to leer at me and I quicken my pace. I'm wearing nothing revealing as usual. Only this time, I opted for shorts instead of my joggers. Shorts that are way past my knees.

Ben growls at them. "Easy, Kiddo. She is pretty is all," one of them says. The one on the bench with a beer belly. He is new. I didn't see him last time. Ben nears me, the man winks. "How you doing, Miss?"

The man's eyes gleam with mischief as he notices Ben's glare, I smile at him to irk Ben. He can't be mad at me if we are not in a relationship. My chest vibrates with laughter as Ben pushes me behind him and the whole gym erupts in laughter. The man and his partner resume lifting and I give them a thumbs up.

Ben drags me to the farthest corner from them with our only source of light being the overhead window and a fluorescent bulb dangling from the ceiling.

"Don't smile at people you don't know," he mutters through gritted teeth. I pout. I like jealous Ben and the way his lips pucker. Crap. "Gracie, I'm serious."

"Hmm," is all I say. My eyes return to his mouth. We didn't kiss today. I miss his lips.

Tension rolls off him in thick, troubling waves, his shoulders sag and he draws me in for a hug. "I missed you," he says into my hair, planting wet kisses on my temple and forehead. We were only apart for less than twelve hours but it feels longer than that. I didn't eat lunch with him either. Avoided the cafeteria. He palms my face and I relax under his gaze. "You came," he murmurs. I nod. "I was thinking you wouldn't."

With my new attitude, I don't blame him for thinking that way but I am here for a reason. The switch in my head flips, I pry his hands off my face. We notice the shift in the atmosphere but we don't mention it. His hopeful eyes stop me from telling him the real reason for my presence. I will tell him after practice.

“Let’s get started.” He is quiet as we move to stand in front of a punching bag but his brows furrow in concentration. I motion to his hands. “Let me see.”

He stretches his arms for me to inspect the bandage. Good.

“Do I need gloves?” he asks. His seriousness is cute. No, hot. And something is wrong with me for letting my mind stray from the matter at hand.

“Na, this is fine. We need to work on your block, punch and kick combo. Jack likes to go one, two. One, two, three,” I say and demonstrate, punching the bag in quick succession with a kick to explain my point. “Like that.” My feet return to the floor after another kick but I continue bouncing on my toes. Coach says it helps to keep me alert and Jack, Ben’s opponent for Saturday, is always alert. I create space for Ben to repeat the moves and my cheeks grow hot under his gaze. “Your turn, Ben. Stop staring at me like that.”

“You are so pretty.” He supports his words with a chaste kiss to my lips and my brain blanks. Benny thinks I am pretty. My mouth opens and closes as he recreates my moves, throwing in a little kick of his own. He flashes me a grin. “How did I do, Coach?”

I shake my head to clear the cobwebs growing in my brain. This will be hard. “Good.”

He smirks and crosses his arms, my mouth waters at his biceps. He is so strong and masculine. Did Hayden look this hot as a teen? My brother isn’t as skinny as I am but he isn’t bulky. My heart clenches as my thoughts drift to unholy places and I look away. Why can’t he be mine? I don’t know who created the ranking system but they were not fair to me.

The poster child should get a reward for being a good girl. I want him to be my reward. I really like him.

“Just good, Coach?” I shrug. “Come on.” His eyes crinkle with delight. He stands in front of me with his arms planted on his hips. Sexiness oozes out of his pores, he grins. “Admit it, you were impressed.”

“I can do it better.” Ben snorts. “Watch,” I say and slap my phone against his chest, “and learn.”

My fists connect with the punching bag in a tap, tap, punch rhythm. I forget where I am and punch the bag like I have seen professional boxers do. I keep going at it until my arms protest and my speed slows. When I stop, my breath comes out short and heavy. It has been a while since I used the punching bag. Most of my fights mainly involve only the legs.

“What?” I snap at Ben’s prolonged stare.

He blinks like he is having trouble believing what he saw, I snatch the bottle of water someone rushes to offer me and take a greedy gulp. Aside from the state of this building, the occupants are pretty chill.

“Wow,” Ben says with open admiration.

“That’s how it’s done,” I manage to reply. I take another gulp. Shit. My arms hurt like hell. Weighs a ton.

“She will kick your ass, Kiddo,” the man from earlier screams. “Run while you still can.”

Ben rolls his eyes, I giggle. Without looking back, he says, “Mind your own goddamn business, old man.”

The men roar with laughter, letting us know it’s all in good fun. Ben tugs me to his chest and my breath catches in my throat. Sweat drips down my forehead to his tank top. He doesn’t notice, if he does, he doesn’t care. My mouth is wet with the water I drank, his head lowers and he nibbles on the soft flesh before capturing my lips. The bottle drops to my feet, I don’t remember being carried but my legs slip around his waist and my back presses against a wall.

He tastes like mint. Mint is his favourite bubble gum flavour. I like mint. I groan against him, he breaks our kiss to pepper more kisses along my neck, collar bone and any open skin. He cups the base of my neck.

“Gracie,” he says with a peck to my jaw. “My Juliet.” I melt in his hold, at his words. The intensity of the emotions on his face has my insides knotting with dread. Too bad we can’t be together. “You did not kiss me in the morning,” he whispers against my neck and a chill shoots to my toes. “I didn’t like it.”

“Ben.” I place my hands on his chest and he sets me on my feet. Giggles tunnel out of my lips as he rubs his nose against mine. No one pays us attention and I am grateful for that. His proximity messes with my brain, his scent clouds my thoughts and I forget what I have to say twice. “Ben.” The hottie hums but he doesn’t stop kissing my neck and my head falls back. A moan slips from me. “Ben, stop.” He doesn’t. I don’t want him to. “Ben. Please.” His eyes search mine, hoping for an answer but I wrap my arms around myself. It’s now or never. “We can’t.”

He arches a brow that disappears into the mess of hair hanging over his forehead. “We can’t what?” he asks, tone heavy with a foreign emotion. My palms press into the brick wall supporting my weight, I search for an escape that’s not there. Ben cups my jaw and pulls my lip between his. I don’t want to do this to us. “Talk to me, Gracie. We can’t what?”

“We can’t be together.”

A second or two passes, it’s hard to keep count with his stare pinning me down. “Where’s the clip?”

What clip? Oh, that one. “In the house.”

Ben leans forward like the distance between us isn’t invisible enough. Goosebumps erupt on my skin, an electrifying feeling zaps through me as his chest presses to mine. “So I’m guessing this one,” he says as he pulls out the clip I dumped in school, “I found in the trash just happens to resemble the one I gave you.” Words lodge in my throat. “Right, Gracie?”

I manage to nod. What was he doing in the trash can? Faking a smile, I reply, “Yeah. A big coincidence.”

Another terse moment passes between us, his stare soaks my being with guilt and I am glad when he pushes away from me. He knows I am lying. His sadness is palpable, it wraps around him like a cloak as he processes my reply. He smiles sadly at me and my heart skips. I am such an asshole.

“You could have told me you didn’t want it. I know it’s nothing big but I thought you would like it.” His palm closes around it. I gulp. I do like it. I love the clip and him. “Did I do something?” he asks. I shake my head. It is me. I am not his type and I don’t want him to spend precious time defending his choice. “I don’t understand.” Ben sighs heavily. “If I didn’t do anything, why do you want to end us?”

“Because we are a mistake.” He sucks in a breath that echoes seconds after. I feel more like an asshole at his reaction. But the words burning at the tip of my tongue needs out. “People like you are not allowed to be with people like me.” Ben’s quietness frightens me but I continue, “We are not meant to be. I am supposed to watch from the sidelines.”

He punches the space beside my head. I don’t flinch. He won’t hurt me. Not physically at least and I have proven to be able to hurt him emotionally.

“The fuck are you talking about? Who made these rules?” I don’t know but I hate them. I hate them for making me doubt myself. “Fuck the rules, babe.”

“I can’t.” I shove him gently. He’s in my space and it’s messing with my head again. “We are done.”

His hands fall to his sides. “Done?” He sounds defeated, as tired as I am but I still nod. I fucking nod.

“Done. This won’t work out. Let’s end it before it gets too far and one of us gets hurt.”

His fingers sink into his hair. “And you think you aren’t hurting me right now, huh? How about that?”

It might hurt now but we haven’t known each other for that long. Well, I have had a crush on him since forever but he will get over this quickly and move on to Olivia. She is his type, they are meant to be.

I pat his shoulder. “You will be fine.” I take one step and another away from him but he doesn’t stop me.

“Gracie.” Against the voices screaming in my head, I stop. “If you leave now, then we are really done.”